



Social Impact Consultants

Discovering better ways
to solve social problems

How to Ask Latinos?

Understanding Mexican Culture to Improve the Interview Experience with Latinos

Prepared for

**American Evaluation Association
Conference 2011**

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How Is the Session Structured?

- I. Introductions**
- II. Presentation of the different characteristics (discussion after each characteristic)**
- III. Questions and Final Thoughts**
- IV. Useful resources**

Introductions



1. Why do I like this topic?



**2. Why do you want to know how to
“ask Latinos?”**



Presenting a Positive Front

“Las complicaciones rituales de la cortesía”

Description

- Mexicans value relationships and being of service to the extent that they will provide incorrect information to preserve these valued relationships and/or to present a positive image. **Being perceived as positive and helpful is more important than actually being so**

Observed

Everyday

When asked for driving directions, Mexicans will choose to give incorrect directions rather than admit they cannot be of service. Or, if a waiter gets an order wrong, they will blame the cook or the customer for the mistake instead of admitting fault

Interviewing

When asking applicants why they missed some of the sessions in their training they might blame it on the weather or a family member being sick when they really just don't like the training because they don't feel it's being helpful or they don't understand the topics

Technique

- Reciprocate a positive attitude by using words such as “gracias”, “muy amable,” “lo siento,” and “lo felicito.”
- An evaluator's friendly, positive disposition will result in more and more accurate information. Instead of blaming the interviewee for not attending the meetings try a couple of follow up questions that can help you understand why she didn't go to the meetings



Building Trust

“La desconfianza, el disimulo, la reserva cortés que cierra paso al extraño”

Description

- Relationships in Mexico can be described as **concentric circles of trust** where families and close friends are in the inner circles
- The closer a person is to the **center of the circle**, the easier it is to do business and outsiders cannot be trusted
- Business and formal conversations in Mexico are preceded by **extensive casual conversations** to build trust and common ground

Everyday

Interviewing

Observed

Introductory business meetings might not even discuss business matters. Or, before asking for a favor, Mexicans will hold an extensive casual conversation to build sympathy and buy in.

Moving to the interview questions without rapport may come across as offensive

Technique

- A polite greeting and an ice-breaker question will help bring down people's guard (e.g. “¿Desde que hora salio de su casa para estar aqui?” or “¿De donde es usted?”) Acknowledge the abrupt nature of the questions: “Perdone que las preguntas son tan personales.” Or “Con todo respeto, . . .”



Focus on the Past and Present

“El tiempo cronométrico es . . . vacío de toda particularidad”

Description

- Mexicans are more likely to spend their resources, efforts, and thoughts on present activities than on future endeavors. Anticipating or planning for the future is not given importance since the outcome of the future is uncertain and seemingly out of their control

Everyday

Interviewing

Observed

Showing up late is not frowned on since the previous activity takes priority over future commitments. Or, Mexicans will spend (perhaps with credit) lavishly on home décor, parties, and other sources of immediate gratification

- Interviewees might show up late to an interview and blame it on the traffic or they might not show up at all and cancel last minute
- Weddings and quinceañeras can put families into a lot of financial stress

Technique

- Showing anger or confronting someone for being late is considered rude and shows lack of common courtesy
- Plan your interviews in a place where you can continue working until the interviewee shows up
- When you confirm the meeting, let the interviewee know that you are interviewing many people and you have to leave right after the meeting (even if it's not true)



Circular Language

“En nuestro lenguaje diario hay palabras sin contenido”

Description

- Spanish is a circular language **where a message is prefaced extensively** (perhaps with seemingly unrelated topics). The message might be explained multiple times in various different ways

Everyday

Interviewing

Observed

A friend's invitation to dinner might come several minutes after a discussion about your family, weekend plans, and other small talk. Or, Mexicans will carefully select words that do not offend the listener or themselves

Evaluator: “Tell me more about the service provided by Maria?”

Interviewee: “I really don't understand about these things because I come from.....”

Evaluator: “But how was the service”

Interviewee: “I was late for the first meeting”

Technique

- Let the interviewee talk about those seemingly unrelated topics and look for relevant information that can help you answer the interview questions. Remember that nothing is really unrelated.
- Use words that will narrow interviewees' answers. (e.g. “What was the result of your interaction with the job agency? Did you find a job after visiting the job agency?”)



Indirect Language

“El Mexicano no propone, insinúa. . . . No se queja, sonrío. . .”

Description

- In Mexico, **words are not as important as their implied meaning**. A person might say something, but mean something totally different. The person listening unconsciously looks for hidden meanings and messages

Observed

Everyday

- Instead of relaying bad or confrontational news, a business contact will avoid your calls
- A friend might say he'll call you, “al rato.” This can mean that he/she will never call you

Interviewing

Evaluator: “How was the service provided by Maria?”

Understood: Was Maria nice to you?

Interviewee: “Oh it was very good, Maria is very professional”

Message: Maria is very nice

Technique

- Asking directly will not necessarily get you to a sincere answer and can be perceived as rude
- Sometimes it is better to use indirect language when you are asking questions if you want to get to the real answer. The interviewee might be trying to tell you something without saying it directly



Belief in Fate

“Dios sabe porque hace las cosas”

Description

- The pre-dominant religious beliefs in Mexico are influenced by Pre-Colonial beliefs in astrology and predestination. Some Mexicans believe that events are determined by God and only he allows things to happen or not to happen. Misfortune, as well as good luck, are more a result of God's will than individual effort

Everyday

Interviewing

Observed

In explaining future events, Mexicans often say “Si Dios quiere” or “Solo Dios dirá.” A common phrase when things go wrong: “Dios aprieta pero no ahorca.”

Some interviewees might consider not getting a job or not being accepted into college as a matter of luck. They might consider it God's plan

Technique

- Ask more questions that can help you understand why certain events happened and help the applicant see what can be done differently next time



Communal Living

“El exceso en el gastar. . . afirma la opulencia de la colectividad”

Description

- The saying “Mi casa es su casa” is more than a formality; it is taken literally. Within families, to a greater degree, Mexicans share property and financial resources. **Property ownership and financial independence are not as defined and valued as they are in the U.S.**

Everyday

Interviewing

Observed

The concept of household is much broader in the Mexican community. For example, it is not uncommon to find brothers already married sharing a business and living in the same house with their mother

- The working and housing situation of interviewees might be very untraditional by U.S. standards
- Family is valued over independence

Technique

- Take a minute to understand the specific situation of your interviewee. Who lives with her? Who is she taking care of? Is she working with a family member?
- Don't make assumptions about financial independence just because a 35 year old son is still living with his parents



Value of Age

“Mas sabe el diablo por viejo que por diablo”

Description

- **Age is valued and respected in Mexico.** Elderly people are given privileges not afforded to others. Elderly peoples' opinions and requests are honored
- Siblings feel a very strong responsibility to take care of their older parents

Everyday

Observed

- Many Mexican families have their older parents living in their house. Taking them to a nursery home is not even an option
- Younger people will not contradict older people out of respect

Interviewing

Elderly interviewees will be expecting special treatment from the evaluator. They might refer to their age constantly

Technique

- Be very respectful with elderly applicants and show your appreciation
- Don't push too far when they are not willing to answer certain question or when they say “I don't know” that might be an indirect way of saying they don't want to answer



Candor

“Hablar vuelve a ser una actividad creadora de realidades, esto es, una actividad poética”

Description

- In the American culture, people selectively omit inconvenient truths; whereas, in the Mexican culture, **people often rewrite reality in a way that presents them in a positive light or is to their advantage**. The Spanish language, being indirect and creative, lends itself to recreating reality

Everyday

Interviewing

Observed

A glass installer might tell you that they'll be at your home in 10 minutes when they haven't left their offices that are one hour away.

- Grand mothers will present their grandchild as their “child” because their daughter is not married
- Interviewees might say that they are doing “some work” in the family business even if they are unemployed

Technique

- You can only go so far with the interviewees about certain topics. If you are not convinced with the answers you are receiving ask for documents that can give you exact data about employment, who are the parents of a child, etc.



Authority Valued Over the Rule of Law

“El que no tranza no avanza”

Description

- In Mexico, **the person in a position of authority has the power and authority to assert influence**. This person, instead of the rule of law, defines procedures, rules, and determines who receives services and/or privileges

Everyday

Observed

- Some Mexicans assume that police officers have unchecked power to create and enforce the laws they choose
- Some Mexicans will not argue with staff from stores about return policies

Interviewing

- Interviewees might not understand that they have rights under the law
- Nonprofit managers might not argue with program officers

Technique

- Ask questions that can help you understand whether applicants have exercised their rights or looked for alternative solutions to their problems



Dualism

“Tenemos una imagen ambigua, cuando no contradictoria”

Description

- **Mexico's colonial past plays a large role in its social mindset.** Many events, such as the Spanish conquest, foreign interventions, and the socialist revolution, play a large role in how Mexicans perceive their current state. These beliefs persist even though they contradict current thought

Everyday

Observed

- Mexicans feel victimized by the U.S but many risk their life to come here
- Strong tradition of machismo but women (especially mothers) are venerated
- Intellectuals are respected but education is not valued or rewarded

Interviewing

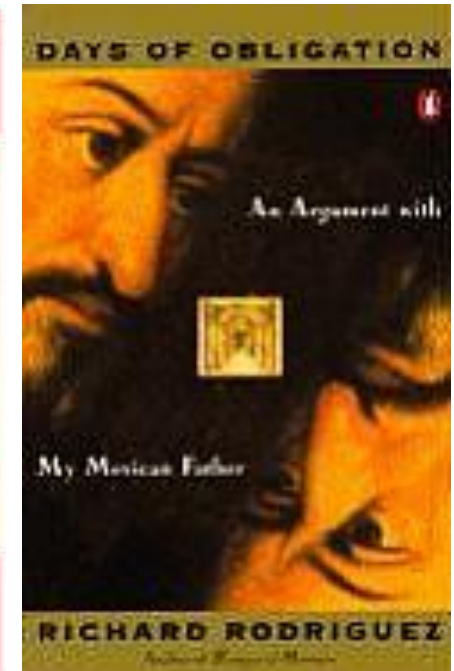
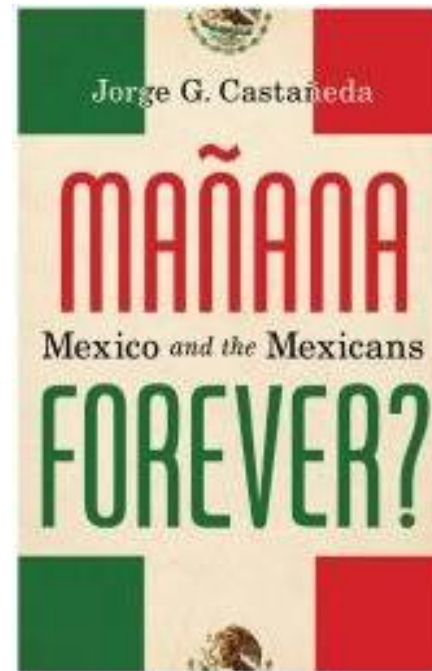
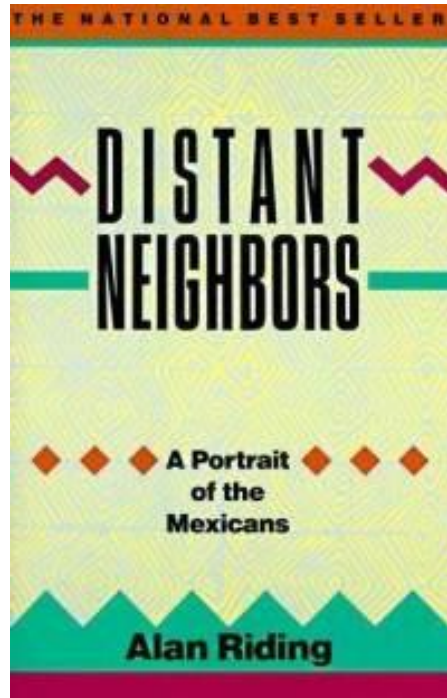
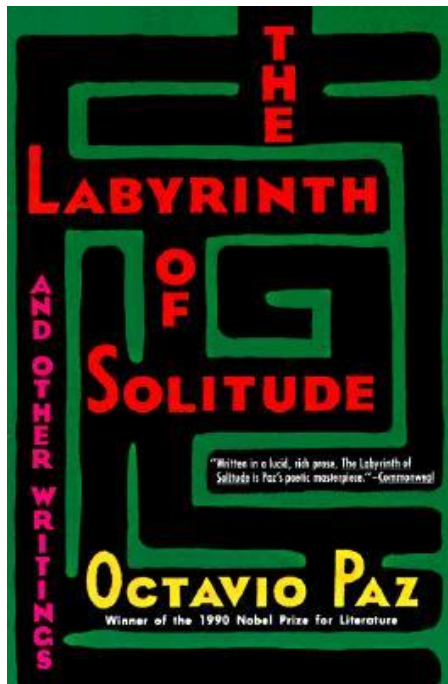
- Some interviewees might have (perhaps not noticeable) hostile attitudes toward an American evaluator
- Husbands will have a dominant role in the interview.

Technique

- Show respect and admiration for Mexican culture. Learn how to say “gracias” and “buenos días”
- Make direct questions to the wife if you are interviewing a couple or try to have separate interviews if possible

Questions and Final Thoughts?

Some Interesting Resources



Do you have any other resources you would like to share with the group?

Feel Free to Contact Me with Any Further Questions!

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Thank you so much for your participation!

Muchas gracias!